

## **Washington State Department of Transportation**

### **Statement about Termination of Work at the Port Angeles Graving Dock Site**

**December 21, 2004**

After reviewing the recent letter of the Lower Elwha Klallam Tribe, consulting with Tribal, Local, State and Federal elected officials and hearing the views of many citizens, WSDOT today is announcing that it is stopping all work on the dock for fabrication of new pontoons for the Hood Canal Bridge at the Tze-whit-sen site in Port Angeles.

We do not come to this conclusion lightly. Despite the mutual good faith efforts of both WSDOT and the Lower Elwha Klallam Tribe to develop an acceptable place to allow the fabrication work to continue at the Port Angeles site, we have jointly determined that it is not possible.

Therefore, it is time for the State to turn its attention to finding another site where This essential Hood Canal Bridge work can be performed with greater certainty. Ultimately, WSDOT must move forward with the vital repairs needed for the Hood Canal Bridge.

There are three reasons for the decision about the Port Angeles site.

First is the site's importance as a resting place for ancestors of Lower Elwha Klallam people and its significance for learning and telling the history of Native American culture on the Pacific Northwest coast. No one imagined, even as recently as last March when we all signed the agreements to move the project ahead, what the site would reveal or the extent of the Tribal burials.

Second, the still unknown features of the site, including the possibility of many more burials, means simply that we cannot know how much more money and time would be required to build the pontoons on the site, if it ever could (or should) be done at all. The time has come to end the risk to taxpayers that more money will be spent in what could be futile efforts toward everyone's goal of fixing and modernizing the Hood Canal Bridge.

Third, we need to move away from the possibility that protracted controversy – even litigation – creates an unacceptable level of uncertainty and will cost precious time and scarce dollars in the work that must be done to fix and modernize the bridge. In moving ahead, we can again unite our efforts. Otherwise we risk the possibility that months if not years of delay and millions of dollars of additional cost will be incurred. Protecting taxpayers from these risks is very important.

When we started the work a year ago with such high hopes in Port Angeles, no one knew how big of a problem we would unexpectedly encounter. Now, we must work quickly to find a new way to build the pontoons and anchors needed for the east half of the bridge. This will be the best and safest result for taxpayers. The bridge rehabilitation will, in the

end, take more time and cost more dollars – perhaps substantially more dollars – than we originally expected. We have, however, no real choice. Meanwhile all the other work on the project that can be completed under the contract at the bridge itself will be completed.

We expect to remove construction equipment from the graving dock site right away and provide for site security. We expect to begin discussions in January with the Tribe and other agencies and officials about the site and its future. We are pleased that our talks with the Tribe can soon start on identifying a reasonable path for going forward to the site's future. We are also pleased that local officials and many citizens in Port Angeles have supported the Tribe and WSDOT in our efforts on the project. Their interest in the important work that still remains to be done by us all together is also critical to future success.